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SUBJECT: CHINA'S VIEWS ON UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.
4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Over the past 30 years, China has metamorphosed from an open opponent to an active supporter of UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs), according to Chinese scholars. China currently deploys roughly 2,000 peacekeepers across ten UN missions. Our scholarly contacts say that PKOs are an easy way for China to demonstrate its willingness to take on global responsibilities and also bring benefits to the Chinese military. The scholars told us China's participation in PKOs will probably grow, but China can only support PKO missions that are "consistent with its principles." That is, a PKO must be UN-led, have the consent of the warring parties, and be "peacekeeping" not "peace enforcement." Nonetheless, several scholars conceded that as China becomes more concerned with maintaining international stability, its preconditions will probably loosen. Two scholars told us that poor U.S.-China relations, particularly centering around U.S. Taiwan policy, could limit China's participation in PKOs. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In recent weeks, PolOff discussed China's participation in international Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) with Zheng Qirong, Vice President and Professor of International Politics at China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU); Li Dongyan, Professor of International Politics at the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); Lu Dehong, Deputy Director of the Department of Research at the People's Liberation Army (PLA)-affiliated China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies (CFISS); and Zhou Xiaoyu, Director of the Department of Liaison at CFISS.

Past Skepticism Abandoned

¶3. (C) All the experts described the transformation of Chinese policy toward PKOs since China's 1971 accession to the UN. CFAU's Zheng said that China's leaders throughout the 1970s openly opposed UN PKOs as superpower interference in the internal affairs of smaller states. From 1971-1981 China even refused to pay UN assessments toward PKOs. With

the ushering in of the reform era in 1978, Chinese leaders' views toward the UN began to change. In 1981, China cast its first vote in favor of a UN PKO and retroactively paid its UN assessments levied between 1971 and 1981. In 1988, China joined the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. Two years later, China sent its first military observers to a UN PKO in Namibia. China's role has grown steadily and, according to the Office of Peacekeeping Operations at the Ministry of National Defense (MND), over 10,000 Chinese have now served in UN PKOs, including 9,692 peacekeepers and 1,121 observers. Currently, 1,957 Chinese observers and peacekeepers are serving in 10 different UN PKOs, including 1,861 troops and 96 military observers. These officers increasingly include high-ranking military officers. In sum, Zheng described the change in China's views on PKOs from "opposition" in the 1970s, to "limited participation" in the 1980s, to "cautious support" in the 1990s, to "active support" currently.

PKO an Opportunity for China

¶4. (C) The transformation in China's views on PKOs reflects broader changes in Chinese foreign policy, said CASS' Li. The change mirrors China's expanding and deepening engagement in the world. The Chinese Government, Li said, views active participation in PKOs as an opportunity for China to demonstrate global responsibility. CFISS's Zhou separately echoed this view, saying China's expanding commitment to UN PKOs reflected a desire to play a more active role in world affairs. Zheng, of CFAU, said that as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and as a nation that has expanded its national power, China feels a responsibility to take a more active role in international affairs. Deeper and wider

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involvement in PKOs is a way for China to take on such responsibilities within the framework of its overall foreign policy, which stresses "the building of a peaceful global environment."

Strengthening the Military

¶5. (C) CFISS' Zhou, a retired PLA officer who served tours as an observer in Israel and Western Sahara, said participation in PKOs benefited the Chinese military. On a corporate level, PKO participation enhances military-to-military cooperation between China and other participating nations. The PLA also benefits from the prestige and resources devoted to PKOs. CASS' Li agreed, saying that Chinese participation in PKOs strengthens domestic popular support for the military and the police, as well as for China's engagement in global affairs. Zhou, citing his experience as a military observer, said that on an individual level relationships with PKO observers from other nations enrich PLA officers' experiences and refine their professionalism. CFISS' Zhou and Lu both said officers today regard PKO assignments far more positively than did officers ten years ago. In the past, officers generally considered assignments to observer or peacekeeping missions as unhelpful to career advancement. In recent years, however, such assignments do more to help officers get promoted.

Obstacles to Deeper Chinese Involvement

¶6. (C) Discussing potential obstacles to deeper Chinese involvement in PKOs, all the experts stressed that PKO missions must be under the auspices of the UN and be compatible with China's "basic principles." Chinese views on sovereignty, said Li, serve as the foundation for these "very clear" basic principles. Specifically, the UN Security Council (UNSC) must authorize and lead the operation, which must be a peacekeeping and not a "peace enforcement" operation. That is, China can only support a PKO to which

the warring parties consent, in which peacekeepers maintain impartiality and in which the use of force is limited to self-defense. CASS' Li acknowledged that in conflicts where the identity or even the existence of governing authorities appears uncertain, China might relax its normally rigid preconditions. China's increasing interest in promoting global economic and political stability, Li believed, will lead China's leaders to interpret its principles more loosely. CFAU's Zheng also conceded that China's involvement in missions in Haiti and Timor-Leste illustrated growing flexibility. Zheng said the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNIMIT) constituted "clear interference" in a sovereign country's internal affairs. Nonetheless, China supported UNIMIT in the UNSC and contributed forces to the mission.

U.S. and Cross-Strait Relationship

¶7. (C) The state of U.S.-China relations, said Lu of CFISS, also "heavily influences" the size and scale of China's contributions to UN PKOs. The state of U.S.-China bilateral relations is the single most important political factor in determining the limits of China's involvement in future UN PKOs, Lu said, explaining that any heightened tensions in China's international security situation, especially concerning Taiwan, hinder China's ability to commit "finite" military resources to UN PKOs. Thus, improvements to the U.S.-China relationship, particularly regarding Taiwan, would increase the number of troops and amount of resources that China can dispatch to UN PKOs, Lu said.

Future Trends

¶8. (C) The experts all expressed optimism that China's future participation in UN PKOs will continue to broaden and deepen. CFISS' Zhou said China desires to play a larger role in world affairs and the Government's position is to "continuously, actively and deeply" participate in future UN

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PKOs. Zhou and Lu emphasized that China's attitude will mirror the view of the United States. Lu said the success of the United States continues to be the "most important factor for the success of the UN." Zhou agreed, adding that increased U.S. support for UN PKOs would probably bring about greater Chinese participation.

U.S-China PKO Partnership?

¶9. (C) CFISS' Lu described at length the good record of China's PKO forces and said only the United States surpasses China in its ability to make substantial contributions to UN PKOs. Because China is "almost as capable" as the United States as an effective UN PKO participant, Lu held, a U.S.-China peacekeeping partnership through the UN could "redefine peacekeeping." Congo, he argued, offers a "worthwhile" opportunity for the United States and China to join together in a UN PKO mission. Lu's impression that the United States "does not have much interest in peacekeeping," however, tempers his hopes that such a partnership may emerge.

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